

## **Thanksgiving Message from Governor Linda Lingle and Lt. Governor James “Duke” Aiona, Jr.**

November 27, 2003

With the holiday season upon us, we would like to offer our warmest wishes to the people of Hawai‘i for a Happy Thanksgiving. We hope this special holiday finds you in good health, surrounded by family and friends.

There is much to be thankful for in the Aloha State. We are blessed to be living in the most beautiful place on earth. Our climate is ideal, our air and water are pure, and we are enriched every day by the wonderful blend of cultures that add so much to the vitality of our island home.

As we look back at 2003, there are specific developments of which we are particularly grateful.

We are heartened by the fact that our state economy is in good shape. Our budget deficit has been nearly erased through strong measures of fiscal discipline and a growing economy, and our jobless rate is decreasing.

As a matter of fact, Hawai‘i has a “problem” that many other states would envy. Due to the tremendous surge of spending by the military and the private sector, we are searching for people to fill many high-paying jobs that are available now or will be before long. This influx of money will produce sustained economic growth for years to come, thus assuring us a bright economic future.

In terms of health, we are one of the best places in the country to take up residence. According to the annual survey of the non-profit United Health Foundation, Hawai‘i is the tenth healthiest state in the union. It is encouraging to see that we have some of the lowest death rates from cancer and heart disease, and that our rates of smoking and violent crime have declined.

We are also healthier because a high percentage of our population is covered by insurance, thanks to the mandatory Prepaid Health Care law. The goal of achieving universal coverage is far from being met. We must look at a variety of ways to bring down the costs of insurance and health care. Our administration is working to address these vital issues in the upcoming legislative session.

We have made strides in preserving our ‘aina over the past year in that our water sources and our native flora and fauna are better protected. We must not lower our guard in battling invasive species and other dangers, and we have taken many steps in the right direction.

Hawai‘i is a safer place to live as we develop increasingly sophisticated techniques for Homeland Security. Last week, our state united high-ranking government leaders from Asia-Pacific nations, along with U.S. military officials, and representatives of business and academia to discuss ways to enhance our collective security. There is surely strength in numbers, and Hawai‘i is leading the way in fostering transnational cooperation in our region of the world.

Of course we are mindful that there is still much to accomplish in the coming months and years. Hawai'i is troubled by drug abuse, and our public schools are not performing at a high level. Moreover, our traffic woes must be addressed and we must continually strive to fulfill our commitments to Native Hawaiians.

All in all, though, Hawai'i is an exceptional state in which to live, work and raise a family. That fact was made clear to us again and again this year as we conducted 15 "Talk Story" sessions throughout the state.

We learned a great deal by listening to our residents tell their stories about what's right and what state government can do better. Our residents took the time to tell us their stories in their most passionate voices. It is clear they obviously care very deeply about their communities – and they sincerely want to make them better.

Hawai'i is blessed with so many caring people. We are a state of volunteers who generously give of their time and money to help the less fortunate. We are a loving place where friendships flourish and newcomers are made to feel welcome. That is why we are the Aloha State.

We truly have much to be thankful for this holiday season. From our families to yours, have a Happy Thanksgiving. Aloha e mālama pono!